



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION  
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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December 9, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC, 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member, Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC, 20515

Dear Chairs DeLauro and Blunt and Ranking Members Murray and Cole,

Thank you for the support of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) in your subcommittees' FY21 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies bill.

These agencies—three of the thirteen principal federal statistical agencies—are critical components of our data infrastructure. Their data help our economy, workforce, and families thrive. As you are likely aware, the budgets for BLS, NCHS, and the statistics line of NCES have each lost 13 percent or more in purchasing power since FY10, hampering the ability of these agencies to meet the challenges of a dynamic workforce, economy, and population. The challenges include the immediate issue of understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nation's families, businesses, workforce, health, school, teachers, and students. They also include the pre-pandemic issues of measuring the effects of, in the case of BLS, the gig

economy, AI, robotics, and automation on our economy and workforce; tracking public health issues in a timely manner and on a subnational level; and ensuring our schools and future workforce meet the challenges and opportunities for the decades to come.

As you finalize the FY21 levels, we urge the following levels and language. For the BLS, we strongly support the House program level of \$642 million plus \$13 million for relocation. To continue to track our dynamic economy and workforce—and produce the gold standard data on jobs, wages, skill needs, inflation, productivity and more on which our businesses, researchers, and policymakers rely heavily—the BLS must modernize. BLS’ modernization efforts are hamstrung by its \$83 million (13%) loss of purchasing power since FY10. (See enclosed graph.) In addition to addressing purchasing-power loss, this level would help fund such initiatives as increasing the sample size for Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS), which would enable state-level data and more detailed industry data. Such granularity would be especially helpful to governors, regional economic development organizations, and other policymakers in the Covid-19 recovery period. We also support the proposed investments for the Consumer Expenditure program, which is overdue for a new design given its burden on respondents. Resources now feasible through big data and technological advances have the potential to improve inflation and poverty measurement. These improved programs will be especially informative as our country recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the NCES, we support the Senate level of \$274.5 million and urge \$5 million of the increase be directed to the statistics account, which has experienced a more than 25 percent loss in purchasing power since FY10. (See attached graph.) We also urge adoption of the House report language recognizing and calling attention to the NCES staffing crisis, as well as the requirements for ED to address the situation. As you know, the NCES staffing levels are nearly 10 times less than that of the median level for other federal statistical agencies when adjusted for program funding levels. Such a strain on staff, over-reliance on contractors, and budget pressures put at risk the viability of several projects. It also undermines the ability of NCES to provide the nation comprehensive, objective, and reliable statistics when education data is becoming ever more prevalent and diverse. We need NCES’ leadership to turn this data into usable information.

For NCHS, we support the Senate level of \$176.4 million. This level would be a \$2 million increase and would help to restore the almost \$17 million that NCHS has lost in purchasing power since FY10. (See enclosed graph.) While NCHS work has been critical to monitoring deaths due to Covid-19, the pandemic has also made clear that our public health data surveillance systems are challenged in many ways. As NCHS leadership pointed out in May, current systems are slow to alert us to “change in key indicators so that interventions can be implemented early in a crisis...”<sup>1</sup> They need to be redesigned for automatic reporting and for flexibility to adjust

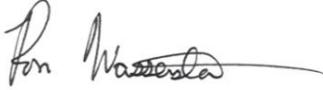
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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalacademies.org/event/05-08-2020/cnstat-public-seminars-deaths-of-despair-and-the-future-of-capitalism>, at minute, 1:22.

quickly to new crises and to data collection disruption. The recommended funding level would help NCHS to address these challenges.

Thank you for your consideration and, again, for your support.

Sincerely,



Ron Wasserstein  
Executive Director

CC: Members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

